



## Brave Fathers of the Faith

### Acts 4:1-20

Father's Day, June 18, 2006

On Father's Day, we honor the qualities that make a man a good father. Good fathers are hard-working, good providers, faithful, loving, the list goes on and on, and somewhere the list will include that good fathers are brave. It takes courage to be a good father in the twenty-first century. One of the best places to learn courage is from a good father.

Now what is courage? Courage is not a matter of going into a stressful, scary situation without feeling any fear. Interview any genuine hero and he or she will set you straight. Real courage is being just as scared as anyone else, but somehow finding the will within to go forward anyway. That is courage. Our sons and daughters will need it in their futures. They will need it for the predictable stages and crises of life. They will need it for challenges unforeseen. Our sons and daughters need brave fathers (and mothers) to show them what courage is like.

#### BRAVE CHURCH FATHERS THEN

Today I want to tell you a story of amazing courage by two men. I'm not sure whether they had children themselves, but I do know that they were among the great fathers of our faith. Last week we left Peter and John just after they had healed a lame man. Before an amazed crowd, they proclaimed that the man had been healed in the name of Jesus, the crucified and risen One. What happened next would test their courage to the breaking point. (Read Acts 4:1-20)

...”Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard....”

Now that was courage. You see, they were standing before the very people who just weeks ago had killed Jesus: the very same rulers and elders and scribes and priests. By all rights, there was nothing to prevent them from killing Peter and John too. The nightmare was repeating itself, just like it had happened to Jesus: arrest, night in jail, hasty trial the next day. When you read Luke and Acts together, you see how what happened to Jesus in Luke happens to his followers in Acts. You know Peter and John must have been terrified.

But when they were face to face with the men who killed their master, and these angry authorities ordered them never to speak the name of Jesus again, what did these

two dead men do? They declared that they would obey God rather than that crowd. By all rights, they sealed their own death sentence. Now that is courage.

My question is: where did they get it? They got it from a name. Peter and John got their courage from the name of Jesus, the name of the One who was crucified, buried, and then raised. In the name of Jesus they called the lame man to get up and walk. In the name of Jesus they proclaimed to the crowd at the temple. In the name of Jesus they stood before the very ones who had sentenced Jesus. “By what power or by what name did you do this?” asked the sentencers. “By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead,” replied the apostles. Their courage came from the name of Jesus.

Their courage also came from the Holy Spirit of God. When they were still learning from Jesus, he promised them this:

...they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict... (Luke 21:12-15)

And that is exactly what happened to them before that angry, dangerous council. Peter and John spoke boldly as Jesus gave them words through the Holy Spirit. The council was amazed to hear such powerful words from such ordinary men. And they were amazed to see exhibit number one standing next to Peter and John: the lame man, now standing tall and so full of joy that he could have run a marathon. The council could not contradict that. All they could do was to sputter, “Well, well, just don’t say the name of Jesus ever again!” But trying to keep those “spirit-filled apostles quiet was like trying to hold back a breaking wave.” (*Will Willimon, Anchor Bible Commentary on Acts, p. 48*)

Here is a staggering P.S. to that story. When Peter and John were released, they rushed back into the arms of their fellow believers, and they all were ecstatic that these two condemned men had been spared from the cross, at least for now. So they prayed together. Guess what they prayed for. If it had been me, I would have prayed that God would continue to spare my life. But that is NOT what they asked for. In verse 29 is what they ask for:

And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness... (Acts 4:29)

Amazing: they ask God to take a look at the threats, but not to prevent them. That they leave to God. (*W. O. Carver, Commentary on Acts*) All they ask of God is for MORE COURAGE -- courage “to speak your word with all boldness...”

So Peter and John got courage from the name of Jesus. They got brave words from the Holy Spirit. They were brave fathers of our faith. They had the courage to stand up before other men.

## BRAVE CHURCH FATHERS NOW

When are fathers called on to show a courageous witness today? What moments do fathers have today when they must have the courage to obey the voice of God instead of the voice of men? More than two hundred years ago, some Baptist fathers helped our nation adopt the First Amendment, guaranteeing religious liberty. So now we don't worry about being hauled before a council as some of them were, and as some still are in other parts of our world. But there are still some small moments here and now when faithful fathers must have the courage to obey God rather than men. And if we are faithful in those small moments, then God may also give us great moments later. Whether small or great, there are moments when fathers must choose between the voice of God and the voice of man.

Here's a typical statement by man: "He who dies with the most toys wins." We all laugh at this, but everything in modern life pressures us to live by this. And men have just as much difficulty with this pressure as women. Over time, the added weight of years of peer pressure and thousands of commercials becomes a continuous panicky voice in our head that scares us that we never have quite enough.

In contrast to this, here is the voice of God, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms, Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven..." (Luke 12:32-33a)

C. C. Burriss never had children. But he has done a lot of great fathering. There are several men and women here who looked up to him like a father. And one of the enduring examples C. C. gave to us was his confidence that God had always given him enough. So he was content to live simply. He had a nice car. He would take a trip now and then. He made sure his beloved Maude had what she needed. But beyond that, C. C. lived simply. And that made it possible for Mr. Burriss to be a great steward of his wealth, to be a blessing to more than one generation of this church, and to be a blessing beyond this church. C. C. had the courage to obey the voice of God over the voice of men. He was a brave witness to his faith in God, and he put his money where his mouth was, and he put his treasure where heaven is.

Here's another example of a statement by man. A husband's cell phone rings. It's his wife. He talks a moment, folds the phone up, and then says to his friends, "Sorry guys, time to go back to the old ball and chain." We laugh at that too (well, some of us.) But there is that strong message in our culture that marriage is but a ball and chain. People have much less faith in marriage than they did once.

In contrast to that, here is the voice of God: "... rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe." (Proverbs 5:18) Now, to move from seeing marriage as a ball and chain to rejoicing in the wife of your youth requires a significant amount of courage and trust that God can move a couple beyond the inevitable stages of honeymoon and infatuation, beyond facing each other's faults and failings, beyond all that to a mature

love and unconditional commitment that will last a lifetime. Last Sunday, Bill and Linda O'Boyle renewed their marriage vows upon their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Marriages that endure and continue to grow are a witness to the power of the name of Jesus

We fathers may not ever be brought up before some council and given the choice of obeying the voice of men or the voice of God. But every day, we hear different voices about how to spend our money and how to treat our wives and how to make all the other many choices we make everyday. May we have the courage to hear the voice of God over the voice of men every day. May our everyday choices stand as a witness. Eventually, someone will notice, and someone will ask, "By what power do you do these things in your life? By what power do you live so simply and give so generously? Or by what power are you able to stay in a growing marriage? And then you can stand tall and speak boldly and bravely: "By the power of the name of Jesus Christ, who rose from the grave, who makes a way when there seems no way."

May God transform you and me into brave fathers of the faith.

-- Douglas E. Murray